

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of claims

1. (Currently Amended) A suturing instrument comprising:
an elongate body member; and
a needle deployment system disposed at a distal portion of the elongate body member, the needle deployment system comprising
a forward-deploying needle carrier,
a needle catch to receive and retain a needle, and
a forward-directed exit port for deployment of the needle carrier therethrough,
wherein the needle catch and the exit port are disposed on a front face of the distal portion of the elongate body member.
2. (Original) A suturing instrument as defined in claim 1, further comprising a deployment controller having a distal end, the deployment controller extending substantially along a longitudinal axis of the elongate body member to the distal portion of the elongate body member where the distal end of the deployment controller being coupled to the needle carrier to facilitate movement of the needle carrier between a retracted position and a deployed position.
3. (Original) A suturing instrument as defined in claim 2, further comprising an actuator coupled to a proximal end of the deployment controller.
4. (Original) A suturing instrument as defined in claim 2, wherein the deployment controller is configured to guide the needle carrier along a path that comprises a proximal curved path segment leading initially away from the elongate body member and then towards the elongate body member.
5. (Original) A suturing instrument as defined in claim 1, further comprising a second needle carrier.

8/ 6. (Original) A suturing instrument as defined in claim 1, further comprising a suture with an attached needle.

9/ 7. (Previously Presented) A suturing instrument as defined in claim 6, wherein the needle inserts into the needle carrier.

10/ 8. (Previously Presented) A suturing instrument as defined in claim 1, wherein the needle catch is positioned such that a distal path segment of the needle carrier's path is intercepted by the needle catch.

5/ 9. (Previously Presented) A suturing instrument as defined in claim 2, further comprising a flexible drive member coupling the deployment controller to the needle carrier.

6/ 10. (Original) A suturing instrument as defined in claim 9, wherein the flexible driver member comprises an alloy including nickel and titanium.

11/ 11. (Previously Presented) A suturing instrument comprising:
an elongate body member; and
a distal tip assembly coupled to the elongate body member such that the distal tip assembly is capable of being rotated axially about a longitudinal axis with respect to the elongate body member, the distal tip assembly comprising:
a forward-deploying needle carrier,
a needle catch to receive and retain a needle, and
a forward-directed exit port, wherein the needle catch and the exit port are disposed on a front face of the distal tip assembly.

12/ 12. (Previously Presented) A suturing instrument as defined in claim 11, wherein the distal tip assembly is coupled to the elongate body member at a pivot joint such that the distal tip assembly is free to deflect about the pivot joint.

13/ 13. (Previously Presented) A method for placing a suture in tissue comprising the steps of:
placing a suturing instrument enclosing a forward-deploying needle carrier including a needle, wherein the forward-deploying needle carrier is movably positioned within a needle carrier channel adjacent tissue to be sutured;

positioning the tissue between a forward-directed exit port, and a needle catch that receives and retains the needle, the exit port and the needle catch being disposed on a front face of a distal end of the suturing instrument;

deploying the forward-deploying needle carrier out of the suturing instrument through the forward-directed exit port; and

capturing the needle carried by the forward-deploying needle carrier in the needle catch.

14. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein deploying the forward-deploying needle carrier out of the suturing instrument through a forward-directed exit port comprises activating a deployment controller, the deployment controller having a distal end and extending substantially along a longitudinal axis of an elongate body member to the distal portion of the elongate body member, the distal end of the deployment controller being coupled to the needle carrier to facilitate movement of the needle carrier between a retracted position and a deployed position.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein deploying the forward-deploying needle carrier out of the suturing instrument through a forward-directed exit port comprises activating an actuator coupled to a proximal end of the deployment controller.

16. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein deploying the forward-deploying needle carrier out of the suturing instrument through a forward-directed exit port comprises activating the deployment controller, the deployment controller being configured to guide the needle carrier along a path that includes a proximal curved path segment leading initially away from the elongate body member and then toward the elongate body member.

17. (Original) The method of claim 13, further comprising placing a suturing instrument enclosing a second forward-deploying needle carrier including a needle, wherein the second forward-deploying needle carrier is movably positioned within a needle carrier channel adjacent the tissue to be sutured.

18. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein placing a suturing instrument enclosing a forward-deploying needle carrier further comprises associating a suture with said needle.

19. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the needle carrier follows a path including a distal path segment, the needle being intercepted by the catch as the needle carrier traverses the distal path segment.

Claims 20-23. (Cancelled).